



A Study of the Impact of *Balika Vadhu* and *Pavitra Rishta* on the lifestyle of young urban middle class women

• Tanya Chakraborty • Preeti Raj • Anushree
• Frank Krishner

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Corresponding Author : Frank Krishner

Abstract : The mass media is a powerful instrument of communication and impacts society in various ways. In recent years, with the proliferation of satellite TV, and the increase in the number of indigenous TV channels, the middle class is spoilt for choice. Across the soap operas [soaps] have become the staple entertainment for urban middle class women.

In the Hindi speaking belt, two popular soaps have caught the imagination of the middle classes. It is found that women engage in discussion about the story-line, characters, and events depicted in the soap on a regular basis.

Tanya Chakraborty

CEMS III year, Session: 2009-2012,
Patna Women's College, Patna University, Patna,
Bihar, India

Preeti Raj

CEMS III year, Session: 2009-2012,
Patna Women's College, Patna University, Patna,
Bihar, India

Anushree

CEMS III year, Session: 2009-2012,
Patna Women's College, Patna University, Patna,
Bihar, India

Frank Krishner

Assistant Professor, Department of CEMS,
Patna Women's College, Bailey Road,
Patna – 800 001, Bihar, India
E-mail : fk.bihar@gmail.com

This study seeks to find out the impact that two popular soaps 'Balika Vadhu' and 'Pavitra Rishta' have on the young women viewers in Patna. It may be mentioned that even though being a city, a substantial Bihari population of Patna maintains close ties with their native village and rural 'caste-class-category' ethos.

Keywords : Satellite TV, Soaps, Bihar, Lifestyle, Balika Vadhu, Pavitra Rishta, Media Studies.

Introduction :

The proliferation of satellite TV stations and the growth of general entertainment channels in India over the past decade has changed the way India looks at television. The Soap opera, largely based on stories that revolve around usually wealthy 'joint' families, is seen to have middle class women as their prime target audience.

According to a report in The Times of India, there were an estimated 3,00,000 cable connections in the city of Patna in 2009. As every middle class home has access to TV, it is seen that women have become major consumers of TV content. For women, television has become a source of learning, helping them to understand their

environment, the world around them and different aspects of their life. Content on television is also seen by some as providing 'cautionary' content, helping women to 'avoid mistake or disaster'.

The reasons for watching soap operas are varied: they are not only watched for story line or content, but also for the glossy sets, jewellery, and attire. The characters in these soap operas may at times confirm or challenge the patriarchal frame of society, and may depict roles of women who are 'stepping out into the world'. It is seen that most of the serials in the Hindi language on air revolve around Hindu undivided families.

Hypothesis :

This research project is related to the impact of two 'leading' daily soaps on teenagers and young adults. The base assumption is that the soap operas 'Balika Vadhu' and 'Pavitra Rishta' have an impact on the mindset of their female audiences and influence the attitudes, behaviour and value systems of the younger generation of women.

Objectives :

The main objectives of the study are-

1. To study the impact of characters of the above mentioned soaps on observable behaviour of the respondents/target cohort.
2. To list the popular characters and characteristics.
3. To get an idea whether young women from urban middle class actually form their desires and aspirations based on situations and characters in the soaps.

Methodology :

The research is based upon a two tier system methodology: collection of primary and secondary data and analysis of data thus obtained.

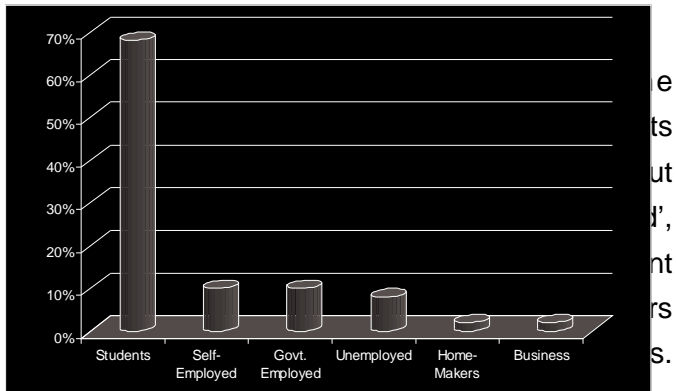
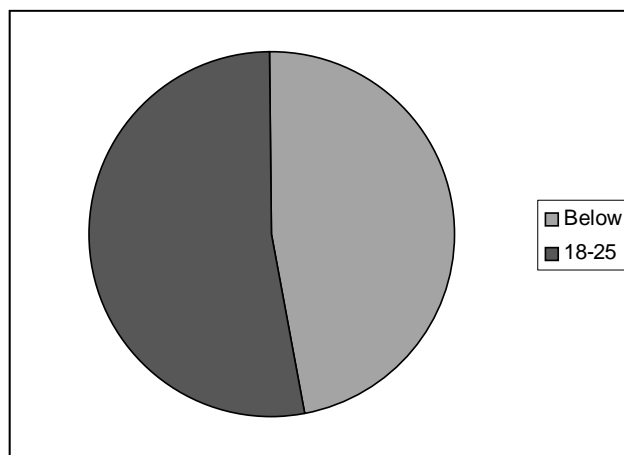
Primary Data :

Collection was through [a] closed ended questionnaire and [b] interviews with respondents. The sample size was 100 respondents.

Secondary Data :

Secondary Data was based upon analysis of different research materials like journals, newspaper articles and matters from different websites. This included a firsthand discussion with a cross section of population.

Sample Size- Out of 100 respondents, 47 were teenagers below the age of 18 [47%] and the rest [53%] were between 18 to 25 years of age.



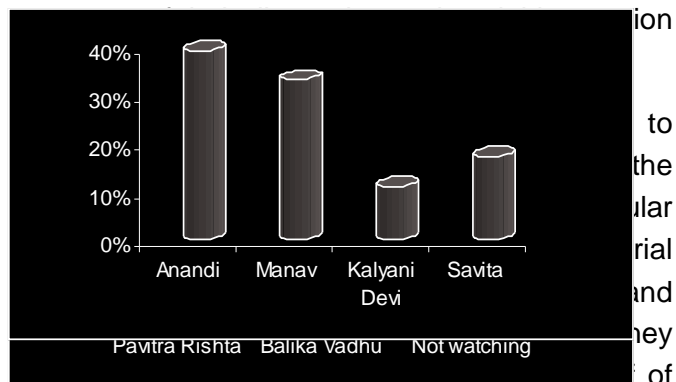
The details can be seen in the following bar-graph.

2. Frequency of exposure to the soaps: 66% of the respondents stated that they 'loved' to watch daily soaps, whereas 19% did not tune into the daily soaps, preferring other type of content. 15% admitted to being occasional watchers of the soaps. From the above data it could be inferred that the majority of Hindi speaking females in Patna [about 7 out of 10] are exposed to daily soaps on a regular basis.

3. Soaps regularly watched : Those who watch the daily soaps in Hindi, 37.2 percent stated a preference for the show '*Pavitra Rishta*' whereas 41.7% recorded a preference for '*Balika Vadhu*'. 21.1 percent of those who watched soaps did not prefer any of the shows [were not regular watchers] and stated that they tuned into other shows.

4. Identification with Characters : A common phenomenon of watching television shows is character identification: where the viewer in some way or the other identifies with a main character in the story. Of the identification with character in the two serials, 39% of the respondents stated that they had developed a rapport with the character 'Anandi' and 33% indicated a preference for 'Manav'. 11 percent of the women interviewed stated a preference for the character 'Kalyani Devi'. 17 percent stated that they identified with 'Savita'.

5. Story line and social interaction : The question was to what extent were the story-lines of the two serials under study a part of social interaction and discussion among the peer group. Of the respondents, 39% reported that the story line or events of the serials do not form a part of their social interaction or discussions. 31% reported that the story line of their favourite soaps are usually (very frequently) discussed and commented upon during social interaction. 30 respondents stated that the story line of the soaps are occasionally



of them reported rescheduling other tasks in order not to miss out on an episode of their favourite soap. 34% of the respondents reported no anxiety or sense of loss on missing out on an episode of the soap. 24% of the respondents were undecided on how to answer the query. So it could be inferred that almost half of the female viewers of these soaps have a great fidelity or loyalty to the shows, and experience a sense of loss if they miss an episode.

Conclusion :

The research work 'A study of the impact of 'Balika Vadhu' and 'Pavitra Rishta' on the lifestyle of young urban middle class women' proved to be a valuable experience for us. As 'media aspirants' the exercise gave us a hands on learning of the way television content can impact society.

Our assumption that the two soaps under study impacted the mindset of the young females from middle class Hindi speaking background was proved valid to a great extent. Our interactions with teenagers and women who were regular watchers of the serials revealed that the situations depicted in the tele-serials and the way the characters tackle them are observed keenly by the audience. The soaps under study had obvious links to religious-cultural practices and at times superstition, and this drew empathy from predominantly Hindu middle class Bihari women who are still linked with the rural ethos.

However, only a small percentage of women actually stated that these characters had influenced their attitudes and outlook on life.

Our research also indicated strongly that the younger set, especially the college students with lesser emotional ties to their native villages were not influenced by soaps, and about one fifth of our sample did not expose themselves to the soaps. This also indicates that to a great extent, those females who have greater media literacy tend to be less influenced by the fictional content served up by the television companies, and tend to view these tear-jerking soaps strictly as 'time-pass'.

Overall, educated middle class women are more likely to display the attitude that television is not generally a very realistic medium. One respondent remarked that TV soaps were a part of the 'culture industry', and were subtly and sometimes overtly promoting consumerism and consumerist attitudes under the guise of so-called 'Indian culture'. Others strongly felt that serials like Balika Vadhu did contain some socially relevant social messages and that at times, it did attempt to question, however feebly, the 'patriarchal order' of society.

This is a small study that can be a launch-pad for more in-depth work since it has thrown up several more questions in the process.

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